Behind JFK's Test Resumption Message

The Impression of Candor Without The Reality: Taking The Fatal Line of Least Resistance

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The Hidden Truth About The Nuclear Arms Race

I

The most revealing portion of the President's speech announcing the resumption of atmospheric testing lay in that passage where he said the leaders of the Soviet Union were watching and "should we fail to follow the dictates of our own security, they will chalk it up, not to good will, but to a failure of will—not to our confidence in Western superiority, but to our fear of world opinion, the very world opinion for which they showed such contempt. They could well be encouraged by such signs of weakness. . . ."

This was not the sober analysis of military or technological need. It was gamesmanship. It declared that we were acting out of fear—fear of what the Russians might think. It also implied that disregard for the opinion of mankind was, or could be regarded, as a sign of strength. These are psychological and political considerations yet they came immediately after a passage in which Mr. Kennedy had assured the country and the world that his decision to test in the atmosphere was not based on "political or psychological reasons."

Fear of Not Looking Tough Enough?

This is very different from following "the dictates of our own security." It is following the persistent but primitive concept that the way to deal with a tough guy is to show him you're as tough as he is. A decision of this character required no patient sifting of radioactive particles gathered by airborne intelligence patrols. This is the familiar strategy of every schoolyard quarrel and bar-room brawl. Suppose the scientific experts had decided that "the dictates of our own security" required no testing. In such a case which considerations would determine the decision—the real needs of our security or the fear of not looking tough enough?

In this realm of secrecy and disingenuous government statement, no one can be sure of the facts. But I believe that in this case "the dictates of our own security" called for a decision *not* to resume tests and to negotiate a new moratorium with the Russians instead. I believe this decision was rejected not because of what the *Russians might think we thought they'd think* (the two governments have a pretty clear idea of their relative strength; only the peoples are in the dark) but because of what the American people might think. Such a decision would be too hard to explain at home. It would require a kind of bold leadership for which Mr. Kennedy has shown neither taste nor capacity.

Mr. Kennedy's speech was most striking in what it did not say. It did not say the Russians have forged ahead or even caught up with us in nuclear weapons technology. It did not fall back on the myth that an anti-missile weapon may be just around the corner that could dramatically change the world balance of power. These would have been falsehoods. Let us look at what Mr. Kennedy did say:

Nuclear Scientist Dissents

New York, March 5 (AP)—Dr. Ralph Lapp, prominent atomic physicist, said today President Kennedy's decision to resume nuclear tests was a political one and that further tests are not necessary for the country's national security. Appearing on the NBC Today show, Dr. Lapp said, "From a technical viewpoint, I do not think that these tests affect the balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States." He added that he felt the decision was a 'fairly easy political one' because 'I think nuclear tests have become power symbols in this age of power politics.'

—Baltimore Sun, March 6.

"In short last Fall's tests, in and by themselves, did not give the Soviet Union superiority in nuclear power. They did, however, provide the Soviet laboratories with a mass of data and experience on which, over the next two or three years, they can base significant analyses, experiments and extrapolations, preparing for the next test series which would confirm or advance their findings. And I must report to you that further Soviet series, in the absence of further Western progress, could well provide the Soviet Union with a nuclear attack and defense capability so powerful as to encourage offensive designs."

This implies that the Soviets do not yet have a nuclear arsenal sufficient to encourage offensive designs; apparently all they have now is a retaliatory capacity. It also implies that if testing goes on they *will* acquire such an arsenal.

The fallacious part of the paragraph we quoted lies in the phrase, "in the absence of further Western progress." This embodies a delusion of semantic origin arising from the picture created by the term "arms race." In a race, if one side puts on a fresh spurt, the other side must do so, too, to keep up or stay ahead. But the facts of the nuclear arms race do not fit this metaphor. Nuclear weapons technology is not an infinite body of knowledge. As. Dr. Hans Bethe said in his famous speech at Cornell Jan. 5—

the value of tests has been grossly exaggerated. We already know so much about atomic weapons that there is very little more to learn. We have weapons of all sizes for all reasonable military purposes. Only relatively minor improvements can be made in the yield of weapons for a given weight.

He spoke of the "extensive Russian tests" as an attempt to "catch up to our technology." In this kind of "race," it is to the advantage of the one ahead to call it off before the one behind catches up. The longer this kind of race goes on, the more the two sides draw abreast.*

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***Thanks to Congressman Kastenmeier the Bethe text is now available in the Congressional Record in two parts (Feb. 26-27 at pages A1397 and A1450).**

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If, as Mr. Kennedy said, "further Soviet series," after two or three years of digesting new data, "could well provide the Soviet Union with a nuclear attack and defense capability so powerful as to encourage offensive designs," then it is to our national interest to prevent new Soviet test series from taking place. These, as our own experience and decision shows, must take place in the atmosphere where they are open to long range detection without any special system of international surveillance. Underground tests have proven of limited value; indeed their chief effect has been to provide the Teller-military-AEC combination with a way to confuse the public and to hamper the test ban negotiations. An agreement with moderate inspection might have been reached if inspection requirements had not been pitched so high as to make the Russians fear our real purpose was military intelligence. Thus the talks broke down and now our resumption of atmospheric testing will give the Russians the excuse they want for that new series of tests which may end our nuclear superiority.

How Teller Hurt U.S. Security

Time will reveal that those who campaigned for a nuclear test ban were acting in the best interests of U.S. security while those who oposed it, and built up so many nightmares to frighten the public away from it, as Dr. Edward Teller and the AEC-Pentagon crowd did, were acting against our country's best interest. A test ban would have frozen the nuclear arms race at a point of clear U.S. technological superiority. It still could, for we are still ahead. But this would require courageous leadership—in explaining the true nature of the nuclear arms race to the public, in freeing ourselves from the notion that only an elaborate system of surveillance within Russia could police a new ban, and in defying those interests which are opposed to any kind of halt for very different reasons. The arms industry crowd wants new tests to provide new models, or "generations," of missiles to maintain sales as they maintain sales of automobiles—with new gadget improvements every year.

II

To assess Mr. Kennedy's test resumption message one must clear away the fog of propaganda. An obstacle to any new test cessation agreement is the charge that the Russians broke the last one. But is this quite true? How many Americans remember that on December 29, 1959, President Eisenhower announced that we no longer considered ourselves bound by the test moratorium and declared ourselves "free to resume nuclear testing" at any time we chose to do so? Mr. Eisenhower said that in the meantime the U.S. "will continue its active program of weapon research development." The Russians may justly be condemned for starting up first, but it can hardly be said that they broke an agreement. Mr. Eisenhower had publicly abrogated it a year and a half earlier.

A second factor which needs evaluation is the part played by the U-2 incident six months after Eisenhower's declaration. Few Americans are aware of the extent to which we had been "inspecting" Russia via the U-2 or its consequences for Russian security. Thanks to the recent indiscretion of Col. Barney Oldfield, chief press officer of the North American Defense Command, we now have a very clear view of how effective this aerial surveillance was. Col. Oldfield was accused of violating security by telling a space writers conference at Fort Worth, Texas, that we knew of Soviet space failures because our U-2 showed Soviet launching pads with rockets in place and then scorched earth at the same sites. Obviously we had been getting a pretty close look behind that Iron Curtain.

A few days later Col. Oldfield gave an interview to the Canadian Press (*New York Herald-Tribune*, Feb. 24) which left less to inference: "Col. Oldfield said the photographs taken by the U-2 planes over a period of four years gave the U.S. a great deal of information on Soviet military power, including the location of missile and atomic sites, aircraft and submarine production and rocket developments." Then Col. Oldfield added that although the U-2 flights were called off in May, 1960, after they had wrecked the summit, "this didn't leave us exactly paralyzed on getting Soviet intelligence." Col. Oldfield, Canadian Press said, did not elaborate on this hint.

There is reason to believe that we have reconnaissance satellites which have taken over the photography tasks of the U-2. Thus an Associated Press dispatch from Washington January 5 (*New York Post*, same day) quoted "U.S. intelligence specialists" as saying that the Soviets were lagging in the ICBM race. "The most recent intelligence evaluations, sources said," according to the AP, "credit the Russians with what were termed 'startlingly few' liquid fuel ICBM's in place. They said the Russians have three or four fewer than the U.S. which has emplaced 45 liquid-fuel Atlas ICBM's." Obviously, U-2 or no U-2, we are still getting close enough looks at Russia to count missiles in place.

It would appear that while the public has been told about the impossibility of disarmament without inspection, and the Soviets have been denounced for unwillingness to "open up," the Soviet Union has been subjected to very thorough inspection. The truth about this did not begin to come out until after the U-2 incident; a month later, in June, 1960, then CIA Director Allen Dulles first gave the Senate preparedness subcommittee a secret briefing in which he was able to disclose that there was no missile gap.

Both Dr. Ralph Lapp in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and Dr. Bethe in his Cornell speech declared the U-2 had much to do with the resumption of Soviet nuclear testing. "Soviet secrecy as to their strategic bases," Dr. Lapp wrote (p. 288, BAS, Sept. 1961), "was a priceless asset and must

Le May Agrees With Bethe on Anti-Missile

Q. Would an anti-ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile] in Soviet hands seriously diminish the 'overwhelming superiority' of the U.S. to which you have referred?

A. No. . . .

Q. What effect would an anti-ICBM in the hands of one nation and not the others have on the balance of power?

A. It might have none—or very little effect. . . .

Q. Can any defense actually be saturated, as a rule?

A. There is no airtight, perfect defense against manned bombers or missiles.

Q. Is there none in sight?

A. No. There never has been one in sight. There is no such thing as a perfect airtight defense. . . .

Q. If a choice had to be made between the B-70 and an anti-missile missile, which should it be?

A. I don't think we have to choose one or the other. But if we did have to, I would take the offensive weapon.

—Interview with Gen. Curtis Le May, Air Force Chief of Staff, U.S. News & World Report, Nov. 27, '61.

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have given the Kremlin a great sense of security. This position of security was undermined by the U-2 affair. Generals in the USSR must have viewed their fixed ICBM bases as highly vulnerable to a U.S. first strike or pre-emptive attack. To redress this loss of security, there must have arisen a strong military demand for solid-fueled, mobile, ballistic missiles of intercontinental range." Dr. Bethe expressed similar views. He said that as long as the Soviet missiles were above ground "we could destroy them by a surprise attack if we knew their exact locations." The discovery of their missile bases by the U-2s meant that the Russians had to learn how to make "solid fuel missiles similar to our Minutemen which could be put in hardened sites," i.e. underground. Dr. Bethe said that most of the Russian tests were in the one to five megaton range. This range, according to Dr. Bethe, is "just the range" for the development of such missiles.*

Seeking A Stabilized Deterrent

To this extent at least the Soviet tests may be regarded as defensive and an attempt to catch up with our technology in order to hide their missiles underground. By putting their missiles underground as a secure second strike retaliatory force they would cut down the temptation of a first strike against them, the so-called counter-force strategy of the Air Force. As Dr. Bethe said, "The major part of their test series, therefore, may well have reduced rather than increased the danger of war." The whole idea of a stabilized nuclear deterrent is that each side shall possess roughly equal missile forces so well hidden that they cannot be destroyed in a first strike. This means that neither can hit the other without the certainty of devastating retaliation.

III

But the whole idea of a stabilized nuclear deterrent is being abandoned. This is hidden from public view in Mr. Kennedy's message which gives the appearance of candor without the reality. Its tantalizingly opaque phrases hide more than they disclose. Nowhere, for example, does it touch on the question of overkill. How much is enough? The House Majority leader, Carl Albert of Oklahoma, a man not given to reckless utterance, told a Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in Richmond, Va., recently "We have five times the atomic capability of the Soviet Union." (*Washington Star,* Feb. 18). Are we trying to preserve or widen so huge a margin? Dr. Bethe's speech, as we reported in our issue of Jan. 15, disclosed that we can deliver 20,000 megatons—*20,000 million tons of TNT equivalent!*—in 1500 long range bombers alone without counting the 150 missiles (50 ICBM's, 100 Polarises) we have already. How do you divide 50 or at most 100 prime targets in the Soviet Union among 1500 planes and 150 missiles? "The Russians," Dr. Bethe said, "have smaller numbers but still enough to destroy us many times over." How much more do both sides require before they sit down to negotiate?

What purpose does new testing on our part serve in this picture? How much is determined by military and how much by muscle-flexing considerations? Does the clue here lie in the new propaganda campaign launched with a speech last Oct. 21 by Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric? This reflected, as the *U.S. News and World Report* said Nov. 6, "A decision by the White House to counter propaganda—which suddenly has taken hold around the world—that the U.S. is weak, Russia strong." The armament lobby in its bomber gap and missile gap campaigns had pictured the Russians as ten feet tall in order to get bigger appropriations out of Congress. Now our answer to Khrushchev's 100 megaton monster was to picture them as 3 feet small. The *U.S. News & World Report* in the wake of Gilpatric's speech said that the ICBM missile gap was 3 to 1 in our favor (150 ICBM's and Polarises against less than 50 ICBM's on the Russian side). In long range bombers our edge was given as 10 to 1 (some 1500 to only 150 for the Russians).

If these figures were correct, or anywhere near correct, two contradictory conclusions could be drawn from them. One was that with this overwhelming lead we could well afford to negotiate arms control, reduction and disarmament. The other was that with a lead this overwhelming we ought to be able to dictate terms. The latter has become the premise of policy. Its corollary is to speed up the arms race in order to maintain overwhelming superiority. The increase of almost 10 billions or nearly 25 percent in the Kennedy arms budget over Eisenhower's—and now the decision to resume testing—seem designed, as Assistant Secretary of State Harlan Cleveland said at Rollins College, Florida, Feb. 10 "to prevent our Soviet rivals from getting ahead, or thinking they can get ahead, in the hidden and costly game of nuclear deterrence." This policy of course, is made to order for the military-industrial complex which lives on the arms race. Just how it can be reconciled with Mr. Kennedy's "peace race" was demonstrated in agile fashion by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the President's assistant, when he told the Young Democrats in San Diego Jan. 6, "To persist in piling up the weapons of mass destruction is a tragic choice. But we live in a world of tragic choices; and there is no point in kidding ourselves that painful problems have painless solutions. It is an irony of our times that the arms race offers the only road to arms control. . . ." This neatly accommodates the Kennedy policy of running an arms race and a peace race at the same time, though even Prof. Schlesinger only speaks of this as a way to arms control, not disarmament. The dream is of an arms control in which we are so strong that we can do the controlling. This is a variant of the old Acheson-Dulles belief that if only we build up overwhelming power we can dictate an unconditional sur-

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What U.S. Hates to Admit

"Leftwing Laborite Barbara Castle said atmospheric tests are self-policing and the bulk of underground tests now can be detected by instruments and asked whether this doesn't provide a basis for agreement to ban further tests. Macmillan replied: 'While not accepting in full what you say, it is perfectly true that the remarkable advances of scientific instruments may make it easier to arrange some forms of international verification without some of the difficulties which have hitherto made it difficult for the Russians to accept.'"

—Reuters from London on the House of Commons defense debate, Washington Post, March 6.

*** The AP dispatch cited above quoted the same intelligence specialists as reporting that the Soviets would "trail the U.S. by about half a year in getting an advanced ICBM ready for combat." Our solid fuel Minuteman is supposed to become "operational" this summer but the first Russian missile of the same type not until early 1963.**

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The New Military Strategy By Which We Hope to Dictate Terms

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render. But behind these rationalizations lies a simple policy, the policy of following the line of least resistance, which is the arms race.

The line of least resistance is the only Grand Design visible in the Kennedy Administration. A man who will not put up a real fight even for adequate aid to education is unlikely to put up a real fight for disarmament. Mr. Kennedy, to judge from the eloquent words he utters on the subject from time to time, is aware of the deadly danger, but like Eisenhower he is too anxious to remain popular with everybody to do anything much about it; to be that popular one must reign instead of rule. In the absence of effective Presidential leadership to the contrary, the White House is pulled along in the wake of the powerful industrial and bureaucratic interests which would be doubly hurt by disarmament, first in the profits they draw from it, and second in the reorientation of national energies to fill the armament gap. Reconstruction at home and abroad would not require so many Generals and it would not be the same luxurious cost plus operation as building missiles.

Too Hard to Explain

I regard the stories about Mr. Kennedy's agonizing over the decision to resume testing with jaundiced eye. I do not mean to imply that Mr. Kennedy may not have been agonized personally. But no one who has watched this Administration can believe that any other decision was likely. *It would have been too hard to explain.* It would have meant a fight. It would have been too out of character. I do not mean to say that Mr. Kennedy, a clever man with clever advisers, will not seek to find ways to do enough, or seem to do enough, about disarmament to keep the peace people happy, too, along with the arms people. But that only means that Mr. Kennedy, in going with the tide, will do it cleverly.

The arms race undertow is substituting for nuclear deterrence a much more adventurous policy in which we hope to make the Russians feel that, if they provoke us too far, we are strong enough to make a first strike. This is why, despite the discovery that there is no missile gap, we plan to build up a force of some 1600 missiles by 1965. Even hardened underground solid fuel missile bases are not invulnerable if one side can afford to aim half a dozen ICBM's at each ICBM on the other. It is against this background that one can better understand that passage in Mr. Kennedy's message where he said we must test in order to "enable us to add to our missiles certain penetration aids and decoys, and to make those missiles effective at high-altitude detonations, in order to render ineffective any anti-missile or interceptor system an enemy might some day develop." This smacks of first strike, and it is already planning for the *anti*-anti-missile. The direction in which all this leads on the military plane was indicated in Secretary McNamara's speech at Chicago Feb. 17 when he pictured a situation in which we would be so strong that we could knock out the enemy's bases and still have enough power left to use it "as a bargaining weapon—by threatening further attack. . . . Our large reserve of protected firepower would give an enemy an incentive to avoid our cities and to stop a war." This is the first public appearance of a new "counter-force" policy favored by the Air Force under which we could smash enemy bases but leave his cities as "hostages" to prevent retaliation against ours. Here the limited war fallacy emerges in giant dimensions. This is a new kind c "pause," a pause after a nuclear attack. It expects the Rus sians, after the horror of a nuclear attack, to exercise a ratior ality and restraint hardly to be expected from a colony Christian saints. It also assumes that they, too, will build many missiles they also will always have a reserve, perhaps some Siberian deep-freeze. How stop such lunacy when Kennedy himself talks in his resumption message as if n tests would somehow make it possible to win and survive thermonuclear war?

Memorable Non-Sequitur Dept.

Independence, Mo., Mar. 3 (AP)—Harry S. Truman said today President Kennedy 'is on the right track' on his decision to resume atmospheric testing. 'It was the proper thing to do. We should never have stopped it. Where would we be today if Thomas Edison had been forced to stop his experiments with the electric light bulb?'

—Washington Star, March 4.

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